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Mothers in
Council

A LIBERAL EDUCATION FOR ALL.

(Second Paper)

by Charlotte M. Mason.

Hints for Propaganda Work -

The paper in the April number of Mothers in Council on 'A Liberal Education for all' by the Hon. Mrs. Franklin, affords so happy & delightful a survey of our work in Elementary schools, that I should feel I had nothing to add had not the Editor done me the honour to invite a paper dealing with the 'immense possibilities' the subject opens up. It is delightful at the first glance to watch the children breaking forth from school, but if we look closer we observe that many of the young faces are stolid, that some have a vain, some a furtive, some a peevish, some a sensuous, some a sly expression, while ^{Sweet & innocent as many young faces are,} very few have the modest, free regard of the child who is accustomed to think of great things.

This is what we propose to ourselves, to give the children of working people great things to think about, & we are encouraged by the fact that they take to the great things in religion, literature, poetry, history, art, with extraordinary ^{or} keenness. They get to 'know' with a readiness which is almost uncanny, & are able to tell or write what they know in good vigorous English. Let us hear a schoolmaster, of Mr. Hornby of Hunaklet, Leeds, on this point: "It is something if by this scheme one has been enabled to let in the light & air of a gentler & cleaner life, & open pathways of joy along roads otherwise choked or barred by ignorance, or upbringing, or worse."

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What sort of things do we teach them? Again Mr. Hornby shall tell us:

"We read a section of Arnold Forster's 'English History,' the contemporary section of French History, roughly speaking, from the Napoleonic Wars to beginning of the Crimean Wars. We read some of ~~Bees~~ Scott's ^{fine} 'Antiquary,' the 2nd Canto of Byron's 'Childe Harold,' 'The Ancient Mariner,' 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel,' selections from Burns, Goldsmith, Wordsworth, Cowper, & Shelley. We looked upon the history of our country, not only on the political & social side, but also saw it as it was reflected in the painters & writers of the time. We watched the unfolding flower & growing seed in the Nature Book of Stopes, & saw it actually in the growing plant. We read the delightful nature stories of Bees, etc., in the 'Fairy-land of Science.' We turned to the unchanging East, & saw, as through a glass darkly, the land of the Pharaohs, portrayed in the Book on the British Museum; marched & fought again with Alexander in the pages of Plutarch; learned to know the meaning & purpose of our own lives in Miss Mason's book, 'Ourselves'; began to grasp the faith & trust that underlies all true citizenship in Forster's 'Laws of Every Day Life'; & last, but not least, wandered in the Forest of Arden in the company of Rosalind, Orlando, Touchstone, the melancholy Jacques, under the guidance of one William Shakespeare."

No doubt such things as these have been taught before, & the processes of teaching & learning have been rather dull & dreary, but we need not be dismayed, because certain ways of the mind have discovered themselves, ~~when~~ which make it possible for children to learn a great deal more than they have learned hitherto, & to learn with delightful eagerness & ^{avidity} ability.

This is where we stand to-day. The children of the lower classes are able to learn 'great things' as readily as the children of any other class. They seem to acquire the vocabulary of a stiff book at a single reading without explanations. They read a great deal, always good books, & are able to tell what they have read once —

with great accuracy & spirit. They remember what they have read for months, perhaps for years, & they go home & tell what they know.

The Director of Education in an important district remarks, "We have noted that children obviously make for greater efforts than before. ~~Less~~ Learning seems to have become easy, although the pace is decidedly quicker. Greater demands are made upon the resources & watchfulness of the teacher. The books chosen for general reading are thoroughly appreciated & enjoyed. Children enter into the spirit of the books, & display a real insight into motives; humour is enjoyed; pathos brings tears; & treachery, indignation & disgust. So great is the interest in these books, that children frequently purchase books for their own use. Copies have been purchased, varying in number from fifty to one hundred, of "David Copperfield," "Old Curiosity Shop," "Christmas Carol," "King Lear," "Twelfth Night," "Coriolanus," "As You Like It," "Tennyson's Poems," "Penguin Poems," & their private libraries!"

The children become obedient, well-mannered, gentle in voice & speech, quick to take & careful to follow instructions, dutiful, & intelligent. They are not in the least conceited, because their schoolfellows do what they do, & no one is conceited about advantages that are shared. We find, too, that a natural, simple piety develops in them because they find the Bible a delightful Book, many passages of which they are able to narrate, & it is the habit of our minds to ponder on that which we tell at some length rather upon that which we merely hear. If we are inclined to ask Can bono 2 Is not the useful education children get at school quite the best for them? We answer:—Much good work certainly is done in the schools,

but teachers are not satisfied with what they do. A teacher/writer successful & able teacher writes:—Yet we cannot fail to realise that the majority of children leave our schools at 13 with only the sketchiest of educational attainments; they often ~~can~~ cannot speak, & still more often cannot write, good English; & beyond reading the weekly newspaper & odd magazines that come their way, they seldom attempt

875 cmc 302

4

to read anything after leaving school.¹⁰⁰ Neither is the community satisfied, it is not only the ~~the juvenile crime~~ that juvenile crime is increasing deplorably, but that our educated artisans seem incapable of forming that right judgment in all things which should be the result of education. Like the ^{as} Philosophy of the Medieval Church, we hold that all true education is religious, & believe that Grammar, Geography, Music, & the rest, are directly under what Ruskin calls 'the teaching power of the Spirit of God.'

about

Finding that ^{about} all children, whatever their disadvantages, are capable of receiving such an education as should make them intelligent, loyal, dutiful citizens, with many resources for the pleasantness and fullness of their own lives, we feel that it is a public duty to give this sort of education, which should be as free as air, as free as religion; for education is a part of religion.

Now there seems to be only one way of training a citizen of this sort—that is, by allowing him constant, daily, direct commerce between the child's mind & a considerable number of great minds, the education that we all get through the books that we read. And, perhaps, the discovery that children take to the best in history, literature, art, without explanation or other dilution, affords us the greatest promise for the future that the world has enjoyed since the dawning of the Christian era. One of Mr. Fisher's cogent sayings ~~is~~ is, "Education does not raise discontent, it heals it," and we may yet live to see the removal of the

chronic evil of 'labour unrest'. " There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so," & men think & think again on festering ~~grievances~~ grievances chiefly because they have nothing else to think of. Give them ^{the} a panorama of history, ^{the} a pageant of literature, & they will think of noble thoughts & ^{all} gracious figures & fair lands; later, if they return to the sore subject, they will do so with sane & gentle minds.

Think, too, of the simple good fellowship ⁱⁿ of things of the mind between class & class, of the comparing of notes about the arrival of the ~~redstart~~ redstart, about a patch of bogmyrtle, about the wrongs of Cordelia; such things afford a natural ground of common interest without the difficulties ^{and} of uneasy efforts that belong to attempts at social intercourse. A village community sufficient for itself in matters of the mind is delightful to think of, to say nothing of the advantage of having workpeople & domestic servants of trained intelligence.

A scheme of education ~~offers so much~~ which offers so much, & whose promises are already justified by thousands of children in Elementary schools, commands ~~our~~ our sympathy & help; & as a Churchwoman, I long that it may be the means of restoring the Church to some of its old prestige in educational work. This is a sort of education with which cultivated persons are necessarily sympathetic.

Write to Miss Parish begging her to send three pamphlets on 'A Liberal Education for All' together with any hints about schools in the neighbourhood. *in question.*

22 Study the pamphlets with some little care, so as to be able to show that what is done in these 'P.U.S.' schools tends to secure regular attendance, great interest both in the children & their parents, discipline that 'takes care of itself,' & rapid advance in the children's studies.

Thus Armed the 'missionary' is prepared to interest her friends, ~~especially~~ the vicar of the parish, ~~& possibly~~ the H.M.I. of the district, the ~~House~~ Inspectors are generally cordially interested & very helpful.

23 Become acquainted with the Head-Master or Mistress of ~~the~~ ^{some} neighbouring school, & excite his ~~or~~ her interest, which can usually be done by means of the loan of the three pamphlets.

24 When two or three persons are interested, further steps can be arranged in correspondence with the P.N.E.U. office, which is probably familiar to many readers who have children in the Parents' Union School.

By the simple steps I have indicated, so little troublesome & so little costly, readers of ~~Mothers in Council~~ might take part in an educational work which should have a wonderful effect in producing the 'educated democracy' we all desire for the safety & stability of the country.

There is one other way in which we invite & solicit help. We want more definitely trained workers. A former student of the House of Education is usually able to excite interest in the spread of the Parents' Union School among the Elementary Schools in her neighbourhood; whether she be a much valued governess in a family or live at home, she becomes ^a the sort of educational centre in her neighbourhood. Now, this is social work of quite the first importance. An educated girl could not have a worthier calling than to help in this way to 'build Jerusalem in England's green pleasant land'. May we ask Mothers in Council to send us their daughters to be trained, whether for a two years as highly valued (~~& well-paid~~) governesses in families or ~~teach~~ teachers in schools, or for one year, that she may be able to help in the neighbourhood of her own home. We are too apt to say, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' in matters that concern the spiritual well-being of children, ~~how~~ however kind we may be in looking after their bodily needs; and perhaps there is no better way of helping the country than to scatter such ~~scarcely~~ sources of leading & light as I have indicated in many a country house & town dwelling. The education of the country is the business of everybody: we must ~~all~~ ^{each} do our ~~share~~ share.

House of Education, Ambleside.

Almost anyone can help in some school, if only by putting the matter before the teachers, or, again, interesting the clergy & the managers. Some of our best schools are Church schools. Miss Parish^a would put any lady who is interested in communication with some school as near at hand as possible where this work is being carried on. The scheme is attended by no expense beyond the necessary cost of books. The initial cost of these is, no doubt, in excess of the usual allowance for books, but, after the first year, the cost should fall well within even a meagre allowance. £20 covers the books for a school of 160 children, with some adaptation of the classes, & most of the books last for a number of years. It seems to me that Church schools should be in a favourable position to ^{launch} such a scheme, because there are few parishesⁱⁿ which there are not persons to whom the hope of giving healthy & happy interests to the men & women of the ^{future} would appeal. No doubt we are all spending much on destructive agencies, but perhaps a few might be found willing to help in so remunerative a constructive scheme.

Supposing that Mrs. Franklin & the present writers should have the good fortune to awaken the practical interest (generous enthusiasm?) of some readers of Mothers in Council, this is roughly how to proceed:

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